

A TRIBUTE TO JANE MARGARET SOONS (18 JUNE 1931 – 8 SEPTEMBER 2020)

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*“[Achieving] in a male dominated world, without modelling herself on men”
(University of Canterbury, 2021)*

Jane Soons was indeed a UC legend. Jane was appointed University of Canterbury’s first female professor in 1971 and blazed a trail for not only the advancement of Quaternary science in New Zealand, but also as a role model for female academics and students of physical geography. She served as President of INQUA 1977-82.

In 1958, Jane became one of the first women PhD graduates from the University of Glasgow. In 1960, Jane arrived in New Zealand from her native England, having been offered a lectureship at UC’s Department of Geography. She dived into her new role with enthusiasm, and soon established excellence in this area through her early work on mapping the glacial geomorphology of the Rakaia. She steadily built a notable reputation for work in other domains of geomorphology, including around a project in the Chilton Hills focusing on links between climatic factors and soil erosion in the Canterbury High Country. Even after retirement, she took a geomorphological interest in coastal matters on Banks Peninsula, in particular around a geomorphological solution to the establishment of a channel between Lake Waiwera / Forsyth and the sea, at Birdlings Flat (Shulmeister, 2021). At Lincoln University,



we use this particular investigation as a case study to demonstrate to students the importance of using geomorphology to inform coastal resource management decisions.

But it was not just in the contribution to this and other aspects of Quaternary science and geomorphology in which she created a legacy. It was also her approach to teaching generations of undergraduates and postgraduates. She encouraged her students in a different way of learning. Rather than tell students what the current state of knowledge was about a particular landform evolution (as was the “William Morris Davis” thinking back in the day), she encouraged her students to propose and evaluate possible explanations for what was not known. She encouraged students to carefully observe, infer logically about the cause and insisted on precision in the presentation and interpretation of research findings (Holland, 2001). She was also known to generations of physical geography students through her seminal textbook co-authored with Mike Selby, “Landforms of New Zealand” – still a highly referenced and sought-after book.

Jane’s distinguished career and contribution to Quaternary science was recognised by many awards. As well as serving as President of INQUA 1977-82 (and Vice President and Past President) she also convened the National Committee for Quaternary Research for the Royal Society Te Apārangi (1967-87). In 1988 she was awarded the David Livingston Centenary Medal for Southern Hemisphere research by the American Geographical Society. In 2009, Jane received an Honorary Doctorate from her *Alma Mater*, the University of Glasgow. In his oration for Jane’s honorary doctorate, Jim Hansom of the University of Glasgow noted that with reference to the Ochil Hills of Central Scotland, to the Rakaia Valley, to the Cass Basin and to other areas in the South Island, it can be said, “That we know as much as we do is a tribute to Jane Soons” (Hansom, 2009).

A celebration of Jane’s life at UC was held on 10 June. This was fittingly part of a “UC women united for exceptional research – research women’s symposium, June 2021”. This will also be the occasion when the University of Canterbury announced their major tribute to Jane Soons and also officially launched a fund in Jane’s name to support thesis research by geography and Quaternary studies students. <https://www.canterbury.ac.nz/uc-foundation/ways-to-make-a-difference/support-our-research/jane-soons-memorial-fund/>

For further details of Jane’s extraordinary life and legacy, please go to Jamie Shulmeister’s recent tribute in *New Zealand Geographer* <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.1111/nzg.12285>.

Previous Page - Top - Figure 1: Presentation of the ANZGG Bronze medal to distinguished geomorphologists who have made a significant contribution to the ANZGG through sustained interest and participation in conferences and other activities of the organisation. Jane was awarded the medal in 2014 but could not attend the meeting. Jamie Shulmeister presented the medal to Jane in Christchurch, 9/12/2014.

Middle - Figure 2: Jane, Christmas 2007.

Bottom - Figure 3: Field trip to the Poulter moraine in the Waimakariri valley, at the confluence of the Waimakariri and Poulter rivers, 2007.

This Page - Top - Figure 4: Jane and Friends, December 25th 2006.

Bottom - Figure 5: Enjoying a beer, March 2018.

All photo credits: Jamie Shulmeister.

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